

EPA denied access to contaminated site

Legal action against landowner considered

SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE
HARRISON — Environmental Protection Agency officials told neighbors of a Superfund site in north Boone County Monday night that the landowner was blocking access to the contaminated property.

They said they were considering legal action against Hallie Ormond of Harrison, owner of the old Arkwood wood treatment plant a half-mile south of Omaha. Ormond could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

The Arwood site, one of 10 hazardous Superfund sites in Arkansas, is contaminated with cancer-causing pentachlorophenol, which has spread to two now-abandoned wells and a spring near the plant site.

Cleanup study planned

Mass Merchandisers, Inc., which operated the plant for the last 12 of its 23 years under a lease from Ormond, has signed a legal agreement with the EPA to finance a two-year study of the contamination.

The study will be used to create a cleanup plan.

EPA officials told a meeting of 50 people in the Omaha school cafeteria Monday night that Ormond was denying Mass Merchandisers and the EPA access to the site, but they expected to have access within four months.

They also said Ormond had covered contaminated areas with dirt and planted grass without their knowledge last fall. Ruth Izraeli of the Dallas EPA office said that might make the cleanup more expensive, but would not impede it.

Also named in state suit

Ormond, Mass Merchandisers and others also are named in a state Pollution Control and Ecology Department suit seeking a cleanup order. Phil Deisch, a lawyer for the Department, said when he filed the suit that Mass Merchandisers' agreement covered only the study and the Department wanted a court order forcing all responsible parties to actually clean up the site.

Real losers are the people

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT

A Voice letter from
A.D. SMITH
Little Rock

I was hopeful when I saw the headline in the *Democrat* that proclaimed "Union member says it's time to set record straight." But as I read Mr. Connor's angry and emotional letter concerning the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.'s acutely toxic chemical exposure of some of his Communications Workers of America union members, I became very disappointed.

Instead of addressing the real issue of worker rights and safety, Mr. Connor attempted to obscure the issue by launching a personal diatribe against me. Since it would accomplish nothing, I do not wish to quibble with Mr. Connor over my personal decisions and integrity, both of which I am very satisfied with. Rather, I would like to extend an invitation to Mr. Connor to an open discussion of the events of the acutely toxic chemical exposure. We can discuss it in detail. Hopefully it will result in some positive action being taken to inform his union members of the nature and extent of their exposures.

In our discussion I will also bring him up to date on his

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following statements that:

1. I'm to blame that no accident reports were made out.

Accident reports were made out on two people in my work group, but they were thrown in the trash by the district staff manager-motor vehicles. As you well know, I had absolutely no authority to make out reports on your other union members that did not report to me. Isn't that the reason that they pay their one hour's salary per pay period in union dues? They don't pay me BIG BUCKS to stand up for their rights. I did stand up for my subordinates and it ultimately cost me my job. You, on the other hand, are still drawing your cushy salary.

2. Dick Yale of the state Pollution Control and Ecology Department said that the wind blew in the opposite direction and that the chemical was kept low to the ground.

Why don't you talk to your own union members, some of whom will tell you that the wind did blow in our direction on 12-31-84 and all who will tell you that their eyes and throats burned and that they had headaches. Who are you going to believe? Him or them?

3. I did not release my workers.

I immediately recom-

mended to my supervisor that we release all the workers, but he refused. You can confirm this by asking my former subordinates. You also know or should know that I was not allowed to leave the premises for an additional hour and a half after the union got the others out of the building.

4. The union cannot grieve the Benefits Committee.

This is correct, but the union can appeal a Benefits Committee decision, as it's done all the time. In this case, it wasn't even attempted.

Also in our discussion I will ask you why I, as a supervisor, had to make the NIOSH request instead of the union. Was it because Local 6508 had already washed their hands of this incident and had no intention of pursuing it further?

Unfortunately, the real losers are the people whom you are supposed to stand up for. It's not too late to make those accident reports out, James. We will see what your real motives are by what you do about this in the next few weeks.

Please give me a call and I will be happy to open my files to you and provide you with copies of my documents. Let's work together to correct this situation.

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